



Conquering the Comma

A workshop brought to you by the Purdue University Writing Lab

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What Is a Comma?




- ▣ A comma is a punctuation mark that indicates a pause is needed in a sentence.
- ▣ Commas help to clarify meaning for the reader.

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Clauses and Phrases

- ▣ A clause is a group of words that contains both a subject and a verb that complement each other.
- ▣ A phrase is a group of words that does not contain a subject or a verb that complement each other.




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Sentence Structure: Independent Clause




- A complete sentence has two components, a subject and a verb.
- The subject and verb must form a complete thought to be considered an independent clause.

The couple dances.
subject (S) verb (V)



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Sentence Structure: Compound Sentence



- A sentence that contains two independent clauses joined by a coordinating conjunction is called a compound sentence.
- A conjunction joins words, phrases, and clauses together in a sentence.



Conjunctions

- ⊕ for
- ⊕ and
- ⊕ nor
- ⊕ but
- ⊕ or
- ⊕ yet
- ⊕ so

FAN BOYS

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Sentence Structure: Compound Sentence

- The comma in a compound sentence is placed before the coordinating conjunction.

S V conj.
Andy built a snowman, and
Jeff played with his dog.
S V

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Sentence Structure: Compound Sentence



Where would you place the comma in the following sentence?

Dan struggled with his homework, so his father helped him.
S V conj. S V

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Sentence Structure: Dependent Clause



- ▣ A dependent clause contains a subject and verb, but the clause cannot stand independently.
 - ▣ Dependent clauses can often be identified by the use of dependent clause markers.
- | | | |
|----------------------------------|---------|----------|
| ▣ Some dependent clause markers: | because | though |
| | since | although |
| | when | unless |
| | while | after |
| | until | before |
| | if | once |
| | as | whether |

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Sentence Structure: Dependent Phrases and Clauses




- ▣ Dependent phrases and clauses help to clarify and add detail to an independent clause.
- ▣ Dependent clauses may appear at the beginning, middle, or end of a sentence.



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Introductory clause= dependent clause located at the beginning of a sentence

When a dependent clause is placed at the beginning of a sentence, place a comma between the independent clause and the dependent clause.




When Elizabeth called 911, the firemen rushed to her rescue.
DCM S V S V


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Introductory Clause


Where would you place the comma in the following examples?



Since it was raining, we decided to go to the movies.
DCM S V S V



Once the movie began, I fell asleep.
DCM S V S V




After the movie ended, we went out for coffee.
DCM S V S V

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Dependent Clauses

When a dependent clause is located after an independent clause, **DO NOT** place a comma between the two.

I went on the roller coaster because my brother dared me.
S V DCM S V




I became very sick when the roller coaster zoomed upside down.
S V DCM S V

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Sentence Structure: Essential Phrases and Clauses

- An essential clause or phrase is used to modify a noun.
- It also adds information that is critical to the meaning of the sentence.
- Essential clauses are NOT set off by commas.



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Sentence Structure: Essential Phrases and Clauses




The people who work in my office are so uptight!
S essential phrase V

Without the essential phrase, this sentence does not make complete sense : The people are so uptight!

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Sentence Structure: Essential Phrases and Clauses



The martini that I had at Joe's was much better than this one!
S essential V

The word "that" is almost always an indicator of an essential phrase or clause.

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Sentence Structure: Nonessential Phrases and Clauses



- ▣ A nonessential phrase or clause adds extra information to a sentence.
- ▣ This information can be eliminated from the sentence without jeopardizing the meaning of the sentence.
- ▣ Always place commas around nonessential phrases and clauses.

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Sentence Structure: Nonessential Phrases and Clauses



My **brother**, who lives across town, **plans** to throw a party!
S non-essential V

Even without the phrase the sentence still makes sense : **My brother plans to throw a party!**

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Sentence Structure: Nonessential Phrases and Clauses




S **V**
Steve said that he would propose to me on Valentine's Day, **which is my favorite holiday!**
non-essential

Use commas to set off additional information

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Would you place commas in the following sentences? If so, where?




I am planning a trip to Paris, which is one of the greatest cities in the world.

The place that I would most like to see is the Eiffel Tower.

Pierre, who is one of my business contacts, will meet me at the airport.

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Sentence Structure:
Commas in a Series



- Place commas in a sentence to divide items in a list.
- The commas will help the reader to avoid confusion.
- The comma before the conjunction is generally required, but it can be omitted if there is no possibility of confusion.

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Sentence Structure:
Commas in a Series



Consider the difference in the following:

Last month, Alex dated Mary Ann Lee and Kim.


Last month, Alex dated Mary, Ann, Lee, and Kim.

Last month, Alex dated Mary Ann, Lee, and Kim.

How many women did Alex date?

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Sentence Structure: Commas in a Series



- ▣ Commas should be placed in series of words, phrases, or clauses.
- ▣ Place commas in the following sentences:

Martina brushed her hair, put on her pajamas, and went to bed.

She fell asleep and dreamed that she was a princess, she kissed a frog, and she rescued her prince.



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Commas with adjectives



- ▣ Use commas to separate adjectives that provide an equal description of a noun.

THE TEST:

Can you put “and” between the adjectives?

Can they be described in reverse order?


If so, use a comma.

big blue house three hungry kittens

a cranky, ungrateful man

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A Common Comma Error: The Comma Splice



- ▣ A comma splice is an error in which two independent clauses are joined by a comma.

We had a nice time, I hope we can meet again soon.

S V S V

The Internet has revolutionized the business world,


S V

online sales have increased dramatically this year.

S V

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To Correct a Comma Splice




- Insert a conjunction between the two independent clauses.
- Start a new sentence.
- Insert a semi-colon between the two independent clauses (only in cases where the independent clauses are closely related in topic).

•We had a nice time, and I hope we can meet again soon.
 •We had a nice time. I hope we can meet again soon.
 •The Internet has revolutionized the business world; online sales have increased dramatically this year.

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How would you correct the following sentences?



This semester I am taking calculus, physics, and economics.



Calculus is my best subject, and I am certain I will get an A.

Although I am very busy, I still find time to have fun.

Last weekend my brother visited me, and we went to a football game, a party, and a rock concert.

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Where can you go for additional help with comma usage?

- Purdue University Writing Lab
- Heavilon 226
- Grammar Hotline: (765) 494-3723
- Check our web site: <http://owl.english.purdue.edu>
- Email brief questions: owl@owl.english.purdue.edu

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